

Georgia and Florida Congressmen secure viable peanut program in Farm bill

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Through a concerted effort with representatives of the peanut industry, Congressmen Sanford Bishop (D-Georgia), Allen Boyd (D-North Florida), Jim Marshall (D-Georgia), and John Barrow (D-Georgia) today announced the inclusion of the new Peanut Environmental Resource Stewardship (PERS) Program in the 2007 Farm bill, which passed today in the U.S. House of Representatives. This program would help to enhance the peanut industry by providing the nation's peanut growers with the support they need, while also working with them to improve production practices.

Part of the "Green Payment" initiative, the PERS program would reward peanut producers for planting peanuts in a crop mix rotation while limiting the acreage that could be planted by producers to optimize the crop rotation of the land. The Farm bill allows the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to provide an incentive payment for peanut producers who wish to participate in the 4-year crop rotation program. A 4-year rotation will promote better conservation practices, maximize yield potential, and diminish the use of artificially-derived fertilizers.

"PERS will help to bring peanut growers into the next generation of agriculture by encouraging a cleaner, greener method of planting while ensuring an affordable and accessible supply to the markets that rely on U.S.-grown peanuts," said Congressman Bishop. "Of course, this innovative solution could not have happened without the efforts of all of us who represent peanut-growing districts, and I am grateful to my colleagues for their diligent work and support."

"My friends from Georgia and I fought an uphill battle to get this program included in the Farm bill, and our hard work has paid off," said Congressman Boyd. "As a fifth generation farmer, I understand the economic vulnerability of many of our agricultural producers, including our peanut producers. We must continue to work hard to strengthen the rural and farm economy of our nation."

"It was a long, hard fight, but I'm glad that, in the end, we were able to get at least the beginning of a fair deal for peanut producers in the House of Representatives' version of the Farm bill," said Congressman Marshall. "But there's still a fight ahead of us. Now we have to rely on our Senators to increase the funding for the new green program – good for the environment and for farmers – that Reps. Bishop, Barrow, Boyd and myself helped to create."

"This last minute addition to the Farm bill will be a boost for peanut farmers across the Southeast," Congressman Barrow said. "I appreciate Chairman Peterson's willingness to work with us to find an alternative payment program for America's peanut farmers."

"Georgia Peanut growers recognize that there will have to be changes in farm policy," said Joe Boddiford, Screven County Peanut Producer and Vice-Chairman of the Georgia Peanut Commission. "We hope that the inclusion of green payments to producers will be a step in the right direction. We appreciate John Barrow and Sanford Bishop's role in assuring that peanut policy is on track for the future of the industry."

"Florida's peanut farmers realize the amount of hard work that has gone into this Farm bill,"

says Ken Barton, Executive Director of the Florida Peanut Producers Association. “We appreciate the dedicated efforts of Congressman Allen Boyd and his colleagues in the Southeast for supporting policy that is fiscally responsible and ensures future growth in the peanut industry.”

Fully funded within the “pay-as-you-go” rules of the House of Representatives, the 2007 Farm bill includes \$50 million over five years for the PERS Program. It is expected that \$131 million is needed over five years for the program.

“We are working with Senators Saxby Chambliss and Bill Nelson to include more funding in the Farm bill for this important peanut program,” Boyd stated. “I am hopeful that as the Farm bill moves forward in Congress, we can provide additional funding to sustain and support the PERS program. As I have said many times before, it is vitally important that we maintain a strong agricultural production industry—it’s not just an economic matter, but a national security issue as well.”